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6 **IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
7 **FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA**
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9 Karen Williams,

10 Plaintiff,

11 v.

12 Alhambra School District No. 68, et al.,

13 Defendants.
14

No. CV-16-00461-PHX-GMS

ORDER

15 Pending before the Court is the Motion for Summary Judgment of Defendants
16 Alhambra School District No. 68, Robert Zamora, Ray Martinez, and Mari Alvarado.
17 (Doc. 72). For the following reasons, the Court grants the motion in part and denies the
18 motion in part.

19 **BACKGROUND**

20 Plaintiff Karen Williams was employed by the Alhambra Elementary School
21 District No. 68 as Superintendent, with her initial contract running from July 1, 2010 to
22 June 30, 2013. (Doc. 73, Ex. 3). At this time, the Alhambra School Board consisted of
23 Elizabeth Sanchez, Robert Zamora, Mari Alvarado, Paul Enniss, and Adam Lopez Falk.
24 *Id.* Her contract was for \$151,000 base pay with yearly increases. *Id.* In 2012,
25 Dr. Williams and the Alhambra School Board negotiated a new contract for the period of
26 July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2015. *Id.* at Ex. 4. Billie Foltz had replaced Mr. Enniss on the
27 Board. *Id.* Under this contract, Dr. Williams's base salary was \$185,000. *Id.* A May 2013
28 addendum increased Dr. Williams's salary for the 2013–2014 year to \$191,475; a similar

1 addendum from May 2014 increased the salary for the 2014–2015 year to \$198, 176. *Id.*
2 at Exs. 5, 6. In November of 2014, elections for the Board were held and resulted in two
3 new board members. Ms. Foltz and Ms. Sanchez were replaced by Ray Martinez and
4 Cathleen O’Neil Frantz. With the new members seated, the Board, on January 22, 2015,
5 unanimously authorized an additional one-year contract with an increase of 5% to the
6 performance-based pay. *Id.* at Ex. 13. A contract was drafted, but it was not signed by
7 any of the parties. *Id.* at Ex. 14.

8 After the Board authorized the contract, the parties continued to discuss specific
9 terms. Dr. Williams sought to be employed through Educational Services Incorporate
10 (“ESI”), a third-party contractor. In this arrangement, Dr. Williams could retire from the
11 District but continue to work in her role as Superintendent. A February 19, 2015 Board
12 meeting contained two contract proposals for Dr. Williams: (1) a one-year contract
13 through ESI, or (2) a traditional one-year contract, the same as the one agreed to at the
14 January 22, 2015 Board meeting. *Id.* at Ex. 17. Ms. O’Neil Frantz moved for the Board to
15 approve the ESI contract, but no Board Member seconded the motion. *Id.* Ms. O’Neil
16 Frantz then moved for the Board to approve the traditional contract, and again, there was
17 no second. *Id.* Both motions failed. On March 26, 2015, Dr. Williams was placed on non-
18 disciplinary paid leave. This vote was supported by Mr. Zamora, Mr. Martinez, and
19 Ms. Alvarado and opposed by Ms. O’Neil Frantz and Mr. Lopez Falk. (Doc. 83, Ex. 19).
20 The Board voted not to renew Dr. Williams’s contract on April 2, 2015. (Doc. 73, Ex.
21 18). The Board selected a firm to conduct a search for a new Superintendent.
22 Mr. Zamora, Mr. Martinez, and Ms. Alvarado voted in favor of selecting a search firm,
23 while Ms. O’Neil Frantz voted against and Mr. Lopez Falk abstained. *Id.* at Ex. 19. The
24 Board offered interviews to four candidates, comprised of two Caucasians, one Hispanic,
25 and one African American. *Id.* at Ex. 10. Two candidates, Mark Yslas, an Hispanic, and
26 Michael Robert, an African-American, were given second interviews. *Id.* at Ex. 21.
27 Mr. Zamora was absent from the May 12, 2015 meeting where the final two candidates
28 were selected. The Board eventually hired Mr. Yslas, whose contract provided for a

1 \$150,000 base salary. Mr. Zamora, Mr. Martinez, and Ms. Alvarado voted in favor of
2 hiring Mr. Yslas, and Ms. O'Neil Frantz and Mr. Lopez Falk voted against the motion.
3 (Doc. 83, Ex. 21).

4 Dr. Williams, an African-American, filed this suit alleging discrimination on the
5 basis of race. Dr. Williams alleges that Mr. Martinez, Mr. Zamora, and Ms. Alvarado
6 made various statements revealing that they disapproved of Dr. Williams because she
7 was not Hispanic. *Id.* at Exs. 3, 9, 15, 18, 22. The School District serves a predominantly
8 Hispanic population. *Id.* at Ex. 3.

9 DISCUSSION

10 I. Legal Standard

11 Summary judgment is appropriate if the evidence, viewed in the light most
12 favorable to the nonmoving party, demonstrates “that there is no genuine dispute as to
13 any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law.” Fed. R. Civ.
14 P. 56(a). Substantive law determines which facts are material and “[o]nly disputes over
15 facts that might affect the outcome of the suit under the governing law will properly
16 preclude the entry of summary judgment.” *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242,
17 248 (1986). “A fact issue is genuine ‘if the evidence is such that a reasonable jury could
18 return a verdict for the nonmoving party.’” *Villiarimo v. Aloha Island Air, Inc.*, 281 F.3d
19 1054, 1061 (9th Cir. 2002) (quoting *Anderson*, 477 U.S. at 248). When the nonmoving
20 party “bear[s] the burden of proof at trial as to an element essential to its case, and that
21 party fails to make a showing sufficient to establish a genuine dispute of fact with respect
22 to the existence of that element, then summary judgment is appropriate.” *Cal.*
23 *Architectural Bldg. Prods., Inc. v. Franciscan Ceramics, Inc.*, 818 F.2d 1466, 1468 (9th
24 Cir. 1987) (citing *Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317, 322–23 (1986)).

25 II. Analysis

26 A. Race and National Origin Discrimination

27 Dr. Williams alleges that her contract was not renewed due to her status as an
28 African American, because the Board sought to have a Hispanic Superintendent to reflect

1 the population of the area. Dr. Williams bring four counts containing allegations of racial
2 or national origin discrimination: Count I, race discrimination under Title VII; Count II,
3 national origin discrimination under Title VII; Count IV, a 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claim for
4 violations of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment; and Count V, a
5 § 1981 claim for racial discrimination in contracting. Defendants seek summary judgment
6 on all four counts, arguing that Plaintiff has not established racial discrimination was the
7 cause of her termination.

8 **1. Title VII**

9 An employer may not “discriminate against any individual with respect to his
10 compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such
11 individual’s race . . . or national origin.” 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a)(1). A plaintiff must
12 establish a prima facie case of discrimination, offering proof that: (1) “the plaintiff
13 belongs to a class of persons protected by Title VII;” (2) “the plaintiff performed his or
14 her job satisfactorily;” (3) “the plaintiff suffered an adverse employment action;” and (4)
15 “the plaintiff’s employer treated the plaintiff differently than a similarly situated
16 employee who does not belong to the same protected class as the plaintiff.” *Cornwell v.*
17 *Electra Central Credit Union*, 439 F.3d 1018, 1028 (9th Cir. 2006) (citing *McDonnell*
18 *Douglas Corp. v. Green*, 411 U.S. 792, 802 (1973)). Once the plaintiff has established a
19 prima facie case, the defendant must rebut the presumption of discrimination by
20 “articulat[ing] some legitimate, nondiscriminatory reason for the employee’s rejection.”
21 *McDonnell Douglas*, 411 U.S. at 802. If the defendant provides such evidence, the
22 *McDonnell Douglas* presumption “simply drops out of the picture” and “the trier of fact
23 proceeds to decide the ultimate question: whether plaintiff has proven ‘that the defendant
24 intentionally discriminated against [him]’ because of his race.” *St. Mary’s Honor Center*
25 *v. Hicks*, 509 U.S. 502, 511 (1993) (quoting *Texas Dept. of Community Affairs v.*
26 *Burdine*, 450 U.S. 248, 253 (1981)). At this point, plaintiffs must “be afforded a fair
27 opportunity to show that the [defendant’s] stated reason for [plaintiff’s] rejection was in
28 fact pretext.” *McDonnell Douglas*, 411 U.S. at 804. A plaintiff may respond to a

1 summary judgment motion by “using the *McDonnell Douglas* framework, or
2 alternatively, may simply produce direct or circumstantial evidence demonstrating that a
3 discriminatory reason more likely than not motivated [the defendant].” *McGinest v. GTE*
4 *Service Corp.*, 360 F.3d 1103, 1122 (9th Cir. 2004). But “it is not particularly significant
5 whether [a plaintiff] relies on the *McDonnell Douglas* presumption, or whether he [or
6 she] relies on direct or circumstantial evidence of discriminatory intent;” either way, the
7 plaintiff must produce some evidence suggesting that the defendant’s adverse
8 employment action was “due in part or whole to discriminatory intent,” and so the
9 plaintiff must counter the defendant’s nondiscriminatory explanation. *Id.* at 1123.

10 Dr. Williams is an African American, a protected class under Title VII.
11 Defendants later raise concerns about Dr. Williams’s job performance in the context of
12 presenting a nondiscriminatory reason for her rejection. But for the purposes of
13 establishing a prima facie case, defendants do not contest that Dr. Williams was qualified
14 for the role of Superintendent and had received good reviews for many years. Defendants
15 also do not dispute, for the purposes of this motion, that the nonrenewal of Dr. Williams’s
16 contract was an adverse employment action. But, Defendants do contest the fourth
17 element of a prima facie case: that the plaintiff’s employer treated the plaintiff differently
18 than a similarly situated employee who does not belong to the same protected class as the
19 plaintiff. Defendants note that the Board chose a Hispanic and an African American as
20 the two finalists to replace Dr. Williams. In gender discrimination cases, the Ninth Circuit
21 has permitted plaintiffs to satisfy the fourth element by showing that the employee who
22 replaced the plaintiff lacked the characteristics that led to the discrimination. *Villiarimo v.*
23 *Aloha Island Air, Inc.*, 281 F.3d 1054, 1062 (9th Cir. 2002). Dr. Williams was replaced
24 by a Hispanic individual, Mr. Yslas. Dr. Williams has alleged that the Board
25 discriminated against her because she was not Hispanic. Her replacement by a Hispanic
26 individual satisfies the fourth element, and Dr. Williams has established a prima facie
27 case.

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1 The burden now shifts to the employer to demonstrate legitimate,
2 nondiscriminatory reasons for the nonrenewal of the contract. Defendants identify the
3 following: (1) Dr. Williams's excessive compensation; (2) declining student
4 achievement; (3) declining enrollment; and (4) high employee turnover and low morale.
5 Defendants provide evidence supporting all of these legitimate reasons, through
6 depositions of board members and documentation of student enrollment and
7 achievement. Dr. Williams was paid more than Superintendents of similar districts were
8 paid. (Doc. 73, Ex. 25). Some schools within the district received lower grades from the
9 state during Dr. Williams's tenure. *Id.* at Ex. 28. The district served fewer students than at
10 the start of Dr. Williams's employment. *Id.* at Ex. 2. Board members testified that they
11 were concerned about employee morale and there is evidence that teacher turnover was
12 high during Dr. Williams's employment. *Id.* at Ex. 35. The burden on Defendants is only
13 "one of production, not persuasion; it 'can involve no credibility assessment.'" *Reeves*,
14 530 U.S. at 142 (quoting *St. Mary's Honor Center v. Hicks*, 509 U.S. 502, 509 (1993)).
15 These reasons constitute legitimate, nondiscriminatory reasons to terminate Dr.
16 Williams's contract; Defendant has met its burden of production.

17 A plaintiff may demonstrate pretext in two ways: "(1) directly, by showing that
18 unlawful discrimination more likely than not motivated the employer; or (2) indirectly,
19 by showing that the employer's proffered explanation is unworthy of credence because it
20 is internally inconsistent or otherwise not believable." *Earl v. Nielsen Media Research,*
21 *Inc.*, 658 F.3d 1108, 1112–13 (9th Cir. 2011).

22 Plaintiff asserts that comments were made by multiple Board members that
23 evidence a preference for Hispanics. At a luncheon in late January/ early February 2015,
24 just prior to Dr. Williams's non-renewal, Mr. Martinez allegedly discussed the need for
25 the District to assist its large Hispanic population and to hire more Hispanics. (Doc. 83,
26 Ex. 18, SOF 44). Ms. Sanchez allegedly told Dr. Williams in July 2013 that Mr. Zamora
27 and Ms. Alvarado had made comments about wanting to end Dr. Williams's career at
28

1 Alhambra because she was not Hispanic.¹ *Id.* In December 2013, Mr. Zamora in
2 evaluating Dr. Williams, expressed the need for her to hire more Hispanics at the district
3 administrative level and at school locations, to which Dr. Williams replied that the best
4 qualified employees would be hired regardless of race. (Doc. 89, Ex. 9, SOF 42, 43).
5 Dr. Williams asserts that Mr. Zamora angrily told her, very soon after she was hired, that
6 he believed that the superintendent should reflect the demographics of the school
7 district's community. *Id.* at Ex. 22. Defendant dismisses these statements as inadmissible
8 hearsay. But calling something hearsay, without more, does not make it so. Statements
9 which are offered against an opposing party and were made by the opposing party, its
10 agent, or its employee are not hearsay. Fed. R. Evid. 801(d)(2). Mr. Martinez and
11 Mr. Zamora are both individually named Defendants, and thus party opponents. They
12 were also both members of the Defendant school board, when the respective comments
13 were made (Mr. Martinez in early 2015 and Mr. Zamora in 2010 and 2013). Ms. Sanchez
14 is not an individually named defendant, but she was a member of the Defendant school
15 board when she spoke with Ms. Williams in July 2013.² Defendant presents no argument
16 that these statements allegedly made by various board members are not the statements of
17 a party opponent. Generally, "very little [] evidence is necessary to raise a genuine issue
18 of fact regarding an employer's motive; any indication of discriminatory motive . . . may
19 suffice to raise a question that can only be resolved by a fact-finder." *McGinest*, 360 F.3d
20 at 1124 (quoting *Schnidrig v. Columbia Machine, Inc.*, 80 F.3d 1406, 1409 (9th Cir.
21 1996)). The statements, viewed in the light most favorable to the non-moving party,
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23 ¹ Defendants assert in the Reply Brief that Defendant Alvarado should be granted
24 summary judgment on Plaintiff's § 1981 and § 1983 claims for a lack of supporting
25 evidence. This argument is raised for the first time in the Reply Brief, so the Court will
26 not consider it. Plaintiff has not had a fair opportunity to respond. Moreover,
Dr. Williams testified that she was told by Ms. Sanchez, a member of the Board and thus
an agent of the Defendant School District, that Ms. Alvarado made discriminatory
comments.

27 ² To the extent there is a double hearsay issue with regards to Ms. Sanchez's
28 comments to Ms. Williams about statements made by Mr. Zamora and Ms. Alvarado,
Mr. Zamora and Ms. Alvarado were also members of the Board at the time Ms. Sanchez
spoke to Ms. Williams.

1 demonstrate that members of the Board were cognizant of and discussing the race of
2 Dr. Williams compared to the race of other members of the community. It is for a jury to
3 decide whether these statements demonstrate discrimination.

4 Dr. Williams also argues that the Board's reasons for her termination are
5 pretextual.³ The previous superintendent was permitted to be hired through ESI. *Id.* at Ex.
6 3. There is also the fact that immediately after two new members were elected to the
7 Board in November 2014, the Board unanimously authorized a contract for Dr. Williams
8 on January 22, 2015 but rejected the contract on February 19, 2015. In the interim, there
9 were no changes or new information to the District's finances, student achievement, or
10 student enrollment. *Id.* at Ex. 16. But, in combination with the alleged statements of
11 Board member Martinez at the proximate time, where the direct and circumstantial
12 evidence "consists of more than the *McDonnell Douglas* presumption, a factual question
13 will almost always exist with respect to any claim of a nondiscriminatory reason."
14 *McGinest*, 360 F.3d at 1124 (quoting *Sischo-Nownejad v. Merced Community College*
15 *District*, 934 F.2d 1104, 1111 (9th Cir. 1991) (abrogated on other grounds)). The jury
16 must decide whether the District and the Board members acted with an intent to
17 discriminate.

18 **2. Section 1983**

19 In Count IV, Dr. Williams brings a § 1983 claim alleging a violation of the
20 Fourteenth Amendment by Defendants' intentional discrimination against Dr. Williams
21 on the basis of her race. In such a claim, the plaintiff must prove that the defendant "acted
22 in a discriminatory manner and that the discrimination was intentional." *FDIC v.*
23 *Henderson*, 940 F.2d 465, 471 (9th Cir. 1991). A plaintiff may prove discriminatory
24 intent with either direct or indirect evidence. *Id.* Unlike a Title VII claim, "there is no
25 specific test than an equal protection plaintiff is required to meet, and in order to survive
26

27 ³ Dr. Williams also argues that Defendants have abused attorney-client privilege,
28 by claiming that the entirety of certain executive sessions were privileged. If Plaintiff had
concerns about Defendants' assertion of privilege, Plaintiff should have raised a
discovery dispute with the Court.

1 a motion for summary judgment by the defendant, a plaintiff must only produce sufficient
2 evidence to establish a genuine issue of fact as to the defendant’s motivations.” *Id.* The
3 “status of the § 1983 claim generally depends on the outcome of the Title VII analysis,”
4 and this Court determined, in the Title VII analysis above, that Plaintiff has raised a
5 question of fact as to the Defendants’ motivations. *Id.* at 472 n. 14; *Lowe v. City of*
6 *Monrovia*, 775 F.2d 998, 1010–11 (9th Cir. 1985).

7 **3. Section 1981**

8 Count V alleges that Defendants engaged in racial discrimination while making
9 and enforcing contracts, in violation of § 1981. Section 1981 claims are analyzed using
10 “the same legal principles as those applicable in a Title VII disparate treatment case.”
11 *Metoyer v. Chassman*, 504 F.3d 919, 930 (9th Cir. 2007) (quoting *Fonseca v. Sysco Food*
12 *Services of Arizona, Inc.*, 374 F.3d 840, 850 (9th Cir. 2004)). Therefore, as the Court has
13 noted, the Plaintiff has raised sufficient questions of fact for the jury to resolve.

14 **B. Retaliation**

15 In Count III, Dr. Williams alleges that her termination and nonrenewal of the
16 contract was retaliation for her actions protesting discriminatory actions of Board
17 members. Title VII prohibits employers from discrimination against an employee who
18 has “opposed any practice made an unlawful employment practice by this subchapter.”
19 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-3(a). A prima facie case of relation requires showing: (1) that the
20 employee engaged in a protected activity; (2) that the employer subjected the employee
21 to an adverse employment action; and (3) that a causal link exists between the protected
22 activity and the adverse action. *Ray v. Henderson*, 217 F.3d 1234, 1240 (9th Cir. 2000). If
23 a prima facie case is made out, the defendant must articulate a legitimate,
24 nondiscriminatory reason for its decision; then, the plaintiff bears the burden of showing
25 the reason is pretext for discrimination. *Steiner v. Showboat Operating Co.*, 25 F.3d
26 1459, 1464–65 (9th Cir. 1994).

27 Plaintiff claims that she engaged in three protected activities. First, on December
28 5, 2013, she sent a letter to the Board emphasizing that the District will not take race into

1 account when making hiring decisions. The letter states that it is sent in response to an
2 email from Mr. Zamora and findings of her 2013 performance evaluation. (Doc. 83, Ex.
3 30). In that evaluation, Mr. Zamora had indicated that he did not feel the District was
4 taking sufficient steps to ensure the employees reflected the demographics of the
5 community. Second, Dr. Williams had a phone conversation with the District's attorney
6 on April 11, 2014. In the conversation, Dr. Williams expressed concern that Mr. Zamora
7 intended to end her employment because she was not a Latina and she was opposed to his
8 union activities. *Id.* Finally, on March 2, 2015, Dr. Williams spoke at a Board meeting,
9 expressing concern about the Board's racially motivated decision and goal of obtaining a
10 Hispanic administration. *Id.* It is unlawful for an employer to "fail or refuse to hire . . .
11 any individual . . . because of such individual's race, color, . . . or national origin." 42
12 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a)(1). By opposing the alleged unlawful employment practices of the
13 Board, namely their racial discrimination in hiring, Dr. Williams engaged in a protected
14 activity.

15 Dr. Williams must also establish that her engagement in protected activities
16 resulted in adverse employment actions. Dr. Williams alleges that Mr. Zamora gave her
17 negative comments on her 2014 performance review, after her December 2013 letter and
18 April 2014 conversation with the District attorney. Dr. Williams was placed on
19 nondisciplinary paid leave on March 26, 2015, shortly after her speech at the Board
20 meeting. Defendants argue that the December 2013 letter was too far removed temporally
21 from Dr. Williams's placement on paid leave to show causation. Defendants also argue
22 that placement on nondisciplinary paid leave is not an adverse action. The Ninth Circuit
23 "take[s] an expansive view of the type of actions that can be considered adverse
24 employment actions." *Ray*, 217 F.3d at 1241. Therefore, "an action is cognizable as an
25 adverse employment action if it is reasonably likely to deter employees from engaging in
26 protected activity." *Id.* at 1243. Actions that "turn[] out to be inconsequential g[o] to the
27 issue of damages, not liability." *Hashimoto v. Dalton*, 118 F.3d 671, 676 (9th Cir. 1997).
28 Causation "may be inferred from circumstantial evidence, such as the employer's

1 knowledge that the plaintiff engaged in protected activities and the proximity in time
2 between the protected action and the allegedly retaliatory employment decision.” *Yartzoff*
3 *v. Thomas*, 809 F.2d 1371, 1376 (9th Cir. 1987). Viewing the facts in the light most
4 favorable to the nonmoving party, Dr. Williams, a jury could find that negative
5 performance reviews and placement on paid leave would deter an employee from
6 engaging in protected activity. Similarly, a jury could find causation due to the proximity
7 in time particularly with regard to the March 2015 speech. Even assuming that the 2013
8 and 2014 incidents were too remote to establish causation, considered in conjunction with
9 Dr. Williams’ statements at the board meeting in 2015, they are sufficient to create an
10 issue of fact. It is the jury’s role to determine credibility and weigh the facts to decide
11 whether the Board acted with a retaliatory intent.

12 **C. Breach of Contract**

13 Three of Plaintiff’s claims involve a contractual component: breach of contract in
14 Count VI, breach of covenant of good faith and fair dealing in Count VIII, and the
15 deprivation of Fourteenth Amendment rights by terminating a valid employment
16 agreement in Count IV.

17 A plaintiff must show that an enforceable contract exists, that it was breached, and
18 that the plaintiff suffered damages to sustain a breach of contract claim. *Graham v.*
19 *Asbury*, 540 P.2d 656, 657 (Ariz. 1975). An enforceable contract requires an offer,
20 acceptance, consideration, and sufficiently specific terms. *Rogus v. Lords*, 804 P.2d 133,
21 135 (Ariz. Ct. App. 1991). An “attempt to accept on terms materially different from the
22 original offer constitutes a counter-offer, which rejects the offer.” *Clark v. Compania*
23 *Ganadera de Cananea, S.A.*, 385 P.2d 691, 697 (1963). Plaintiff argues that the January
24 22, 2015 Board meeting resulted in an enforceable contract between Plaintiff and the
25 District for the 2015–2016 year. The Board members unanimously voted to authorize a
26 one-year contract for the upcoming year. Dr. Williams asserts that she accepted the
27 contract in an executive session of the Board meeting. (Doc. 83, Ex. 22, p. 130) (“I had
28 accepted the offer of the one-year contract.”). At least two Board members, Mr. Lopez

1 Falk and Ms. O’Neil Frantz, testified that they believed Dr. Williams accepted the
2 contract offer. *Id.* at Ex. 5, p. 80; Ex. 1, p. 63, 72–73. The District’s attorney emailed
3 Dr. Williams’s attorney a written contract on January 23, 2015. *Id.* at Ex. 31. Upon
4 receiving the contract, Dr. Williams’s attorney discussed with the District’s attorney
5 about the possibility of hiring Dr. Williams through ESI. The District claims that these
6 further negotiations amounted to a counteroffer. *Id.* at Ex. 3. Dr. Williams’s attorney
7 disputes this and claims that the District was informed that Dr. Williams would accept the
8 contract regardless of whether she was hired through ESI or not. *Id.* at Ex. 29. Whether a
9 provision providing for being hired through ESI is a materially different term is also
10 disputed. Dr. Williams asserts that employment through ESI is common and, if anything,
11 would lead to cost savings for the District. *Id.* at Ex. 1, pp. 98–99; Ex. 14. The District,
12 however, counters that many Board members view hiring through ESI as double dipping
13 and as sufficiently different terms. (Doc. 73, Exs. 10, 15, 16). Thus, questions of fact
14 exist as to whether an enforceable contract exists. The parties dispute whether
15 Dr. Williams accepted the contract during the executive sessions of the Board meeting on
16 January 22, 2015. The parties further dispute whether the subsequent discussions about
17 ESI constitute a counteroffer, and rejection of the initial offer.

18 Even if a contract was formed, the District argues that it is unenforceable because
19 no written document was signed. The District argues that this violates the Arizona
20 Employment Protection Act (EPA) and the Statute of Frauds. Dr. Williams argues that
21 the written minutes of the January 22, 2015 Board meeting, signed by the Board president
22 and the Board clerk, qualify as a written document. The Board minutes state:
23 “Mrs. Alvarado moved and Mrs. O’Neil Frantz seconded that the an [sic] additional one
24 year contract will be authorized and has been negotiated for the Superintendent, with an
25 increase of 5% only to the performance based pay. The motion passed unanimously.”
26 (Doc. 83, Ex. 12). The Board minutes contain the “specified duration of time” of the
27 employment relationship and the “writing [was] signed by the party to be charged.”
28 A.R.S. § 23-1501(2); § 44-101(5). Defendant also argues that legal action may not be

1 taken in an executive session of a Board meeting; rather, Arizona law requires that public
2 votes be taken before legal action binds the public body. *Id.* at § 38-431.03(D). But
3 Defendant overlooks the fact that the Board voted later the same night to approve the
4 contract. Were a jury to find that there was a contract formed, Defendant provides no
5 explanation as to why the offer, acceptance, and consideration would not also be present
6 at the time of the public Board vote.

7 If the jury were to find that an enforceable contract was created, then Plaintiff
8 could bring a claim for breach of the implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing.
9 Similarly, Plaintiff could also bring a claim under § 1983 for a Fourteenth Amendment
10 violation stemming from the termination of the contract. The Court denies the motion for
11 summary judgment on Counts VI, VII, and IV.

12 **D. Wrongful Termination**

13 Count VII alleges that Plaintiff was wrongfully terminated in violation of A.R.S.
14 § 23-1501. An employee has the right to bring a tort for wrongful termination where the
15 employee was terminated after a “disclosure by the employee in a reasonable manner that
16 the employee has information or a reasonable belief that the employer, or an employee of
17 the employer, has violated, is violating or will violate the Constitution of Arizona or the
18 statutes of this state.” *Id.* at § 23-1501(3)(c)(ii). The disclosure must be made to “the
19 employer or a representative of the employer who the employee reasonably believes is in
20 a managerial or supervisory position and has the authority to investigate the information
21 provided by the employee.” *Id.* Therefore, Plaintiff must establish that: (1) she believed
22 another employee was violating state law; (2) she disclosed this information to her
23 employer; and (3) “she was terminated because of the first two steps.” *Revit v. First*
24 *Advantage Tax Consulting Services, LLC*, No. 10-cv-1653-PHX-DGC, Doc. 123, at *2
25 (D. Ariz. filed April 12, 2012). Dr. Williams sent a letter to Dr. Doug Virgil, the
26 District’s Superintendent for Business Services, disclosing her reasonable belief that
27 Mr. Zamora’s union affiliations and activities violated state law. (Doc. 83, Ex. 30,
28 Attachment C). However, Dr. Williams provides no evidence that any Board member


1 was aware that this disclosure was made, and the letter was addressed only to Dr. Virgil.
2 If Dr. Williams cannot show that the Board, which is in charge of hiring or firing the
3 Superintendent, knew of her disclosure,⁴ then Dr. Williams cannot show that she was
4 terminated as a result of her disclosure. Dr. Williams bears the burden of proof on the
5 issue of causation at trial, and has “fail[ed] to make a showing sufficient to establish the
6 existence of an element essential to [her] case.” *Celotex*, 477 U.S. at 323. Therefore, the
7 Court grants summary judgment to Defendants on Count VII.

8 CONCLUSION

9 Questions of fact exist as to whether Dr. Williams was subject to discrimination in
10 her employment and whether she was retaliated against for reporting such concerns.
11 Questions of fact also exist as to whether a contract was created for the 2015–2016
12 school year. These claims must be decided by a jury. Plaintiff’s wrongful termination
13 claim under state law, however, fails to make a sufficient showing that would allow a
14 jury to find for the Plaintiff on that claim. The Court grants summary judgment to
15 Defendants only on Count VII.

16 **IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that the Motion for Summary Judgment of
17 Defendants Alhambra School District No. 68, Robert Zamora, Ray Martinez, and Mari
18 Alvarado (Doc. 72) is **granted in part and denied in part**.

19 Dated this 29th day of June, 2018.

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21 
22 Honorable G. Murray Snow
23 United States District Judge
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28 ⁴ This is different than the Title VII retaliation claims. There, the Board members
were aware of Dr. Williams’s charges of racial discrimination.